



# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

**UF** | IFAS Extension  
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

  
Sarasota County

# UF/IFAS Extension and Sustainability



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UF/IFAS  
Extension  
Sarasota County

# UF/IFAS Extension and Sustainability 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABOUT US</b> .....	<b>2</b>
About Us .....	2
Our Team .....	2
Vision and Mission .....	2
Sarasota County .....	3
University of Florida .....	3
Funding and Partners .....	3
<b>FROM THE DIRECTOR</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2023 AT A GLANCE</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>WHAT OUR CLIENTS TELL US</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>STRATEGIC PLAN ACTIONS</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>2023 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS</b> .....	<b>8</b>
4-H Youth Development .....	8
Sustainable Agriculture .....	9
Gardening and Landscaping .....	10
Nutrition and Healthy Living .....	11
Natural Resources .....	12
Sustainability .....	14
<b>LOOKING AHEAD: 2024</b> .....	<b>15</b>

# About Us

Sarasota County UF/IFAS Extension and Sustainability operates as a partnership of Sarasota County, the University of Florida, and the United States Department of Agriculture. We translate expert research into community initiatives, classes, and volunteer opportunities related to six core areas: 4-H youth development; agriculture; gardening and landscaping; natural resources; nutrition and healthy living; and sustainability.

# Our Team

Our team consists of 28 dedicated employees (13 from the University of Florida, 14 from Sarasota County, one grant-funded), drawing experience and expertise from myriad backgrounds to serve the community across our core areas of education and in administrative operations.



# Vision

Sarasota County Extension is the most-trusted resource for education and programs that cultivate vibrant communities, thriving businesses, and healthy environments.

# Mission

To provide lifelong learning, programs, and services to help the Sarasota County community develop skills, implement solutions, and build a better future.

# Sarasota County



## Sarasota County Commission

(Pictured, left to right) Ron Cutsinger, Chair (District 5); Mike Moran, Vice Chair (District 1); Joe Neunder (District 4); Neil Rainford (District 3); and Mark Smith (District 2)



## Sarasota County Administrator

Jonathan R. Lewis

# University of Florida



## University of Florida Board of Trustees

(Pictured) Morteza "Mori" Hussein, Chair; (not pictured) David Brandon; Richard Cole; Christopher Cole; Olivia Green; James Heavener; Daniel O'Keefe; Rahul Patel; Marsha Powers; Fred Ridley; Danaya Wright; Patrick Zalupski; and Anita Zucker.



## UF/IFAS Extension Dean

Dr. Andra D. Johnson

# Funding and Partners

Our services are supported by funding from Sarasota County Government, the State of Florida (University of Florida), and the United States Government (U.S. Department of Agriculture). In addition, staff develop an array of projects, programs and other education efforts with grant funding from and partnerships with multiple agencies and organizations, including the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Department of Children and Families, the U.S. Department of Energy, Charles and Margery Barancik Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Sarasota County, The Patterson Foundation, the William G. & Marie Selby Foundation and Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium. Partnerships with nonprofits, county and city departments, and volunteers also aid our success.



# From the Director

In this 2023 Annual Report, we will highlight for you how Sarasota County UF/IFAS Extension and Sustainability is here to serve our community through education, technical assistance, and youth development. The partnership between Sarasota County and the University of Florida means we can bring you the latest scientific research to help solve local challenges like water quality, health and nutrition, workforce training, energy and water conservation, and so much more.



In 2023, Sarasota County Extension provided direct education to roughly 44,000 individuals through upward of 315 classes, as well as via requested presentations, technical support, and consultations. The 4-H Youth Development program reached 9,496 youth participants in clubs, camps, competitions, and more. And, through our online resources, including 309 new videos, engaging social media content, and educational blogs, we reached a combined audience of some 1.7 million people. We couldn't have achieved this without our 268 volunteers, who shared their time and knowledge at a value of nearly \$380,000.

This report showcases a selection of the areas in which Extension provided support over the last year, including a continued focus on workforce development through agricultural training, education of ecotourism and environmental professionals, pesticide licensing, green business certification, and more. The new Neighborhoods Best Practices resources developed this year support homeowners associations in understanding science-based solutions for landscaping, preserve management, pond maintenance, and much more. The new Ways to Save program targeted inflation concerns by providing practical solutions for saving money for residents both inside and outside their homes. Water quality remained a high-priority topic, with living shorelines workshops, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ consultations, pond assessments, and irrigation evaluations.



We are excited to be planning many more educational opportunities in 2024. The Sarasota County Starter Kit will help new residents ease their transition to living on the Suncoast through a series of webinars on topics from gardening and landscaping to disaster preparedness and wildlife. A new virtual tour will enable visitors to the Extension office to learn about all its demonstration areas and how they can apply those strategies in their own homes. And work will begin on the new Educational Outreach Garden thanks to leadership by Master Gardener Volunteers.

We hope you will join us in the coming year to learn, engage, and help improve the quality of life in Sarasota County. We're here to help you access research-based answers to your questions, and hope to see you at our many classes and events in 2024!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lee Hayes Byron". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional but personal style.

Lee Hayes Byron  
County Extension Director  
Sarasota County UF/IFAS Extension and Sustainability

# 2023 At a Glance

315



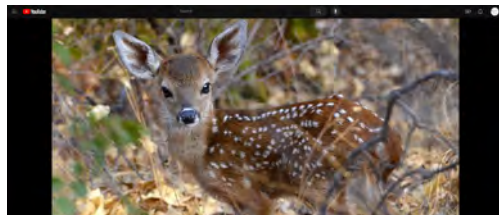
Classes, workshops, camps and other events delivered, with roughly **8,000** total registrants.

43,972



Clients educated through classes, field visits, phone calls, emails or other direct consultations.

309



New videos produced on Extension topics, reaching a total audience of **111,049**.

268



Extension volunteers provided **12,879** hours of service, worth **\$378,771** in labor.

51



Newsletters delivered across Extension program areas, reaching a total audience of **139,427**.

1.7 million



Online connections, including web visits, blog posts, video views, and social media interactions.

**99%** of clients satisfied\*

**95%** benefitted from contact\*

**81%** used information\*

\* University of Florida survey of clients (2021)

# What Our Clients Tell Us



## FARM AND RANCH TOUR

“ Thank you all for the most amazing tour. This was the most interesting activity I've participated in during my 20 years in Sarasota. It's difficult to pick out the best part, because everything was new and fascinating. Just learning about your connections to the land and agriculture over decades was quite moving. ”

## ECOWALK: MANGROVES

“ What an awesome experience! Our guide did an excellent job teaching us about the three types of mangrove trees here in Florida: red, black and white. I was fascinated by all I learned and want to take the walk again to reinforce what he taught us so I can pass it on to family and friends. ”



## SUSTAINABILITY

“ Thank you so much for such an incredible webinar. I have become more charged (pun intended) to delve into the world of sustainability and climate action because of you. I thoroughly appreciate the wealth of knowledge and insights you provided. ”

## COMPOSTING

“ Thank you all for a great session this morning! All of the kids really enjoyed it and my daughter ... was even in her room sorting her pretend food into bins that can go in compost or not. ”



## INSTANT PRESSURE COOKING 101

“ Thank you for this informative class and resources. I am more confident to try things now. I am excited to be able to make healthy options in an easy way. I have some special dietary needs, so this is going to be extra helpful. All of the classes I have engaged with at Extension have been so great! What a wonderful resource for our community. ”

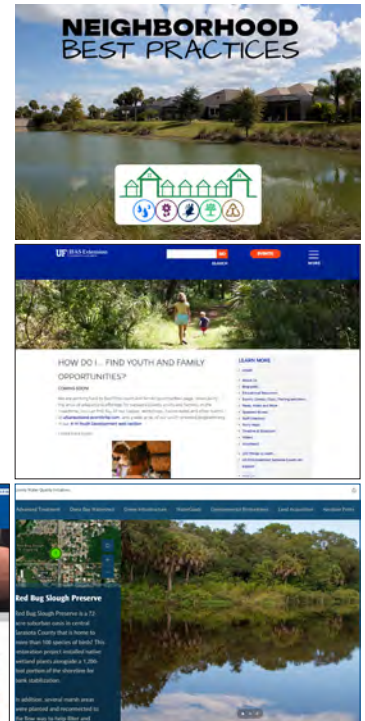




# Strategic Plan Actions

## 2023

- Best Practices for Neighborhoods
- Environmental Opportunities for Youth and Families
- Food System Needs Assessment
- Greenhouse Gas Inventory and LEED Certification Submission
- Household Savings Education
- Water Quality Story Map



## 2024

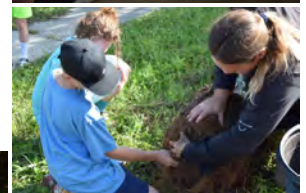
- Education for New Residents
- Extension Demonstration Landscape
- Extension Virtual Tour
- Vulnerability Assessment and Resilience Plan
- Extension Annual Survey
- Extension Facility Funding Evaluation



# 2023 Program Highlights

## 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

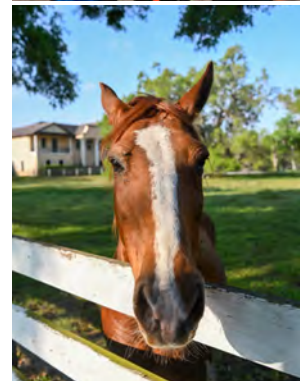
- 9,496 youth participants in 4-H programs, placing Sarasota County in the top five among all Florida counties.
- 604 group learning events (such as club and volunteer leader meetings, trainings, camps, and more), with a participation of 2,981 youths and 952 adults.
- 15 active 4-H community clubs, with 175 youth members who participated in experiential learning on topics including: cattle, swine, rabbits, poultry, dogs, clothing/sewing, ecological sciences, leadership skills, plants, robotics, and more.
- Nine local youth attended Extension’s annual 4-H Day at the Capitol in Tallahassee, with opportunities to learn about the legislative process, along with meeting Sen. Joe Gruters and other local lawmakers.
- Coordinated participation of 100-plus 4-H youth with 200-plus projects at the annual Sarasota County Agricultural Fair.
- Facilitated the 4-H Radish Growing Project, providing educational materials and oversight for 140 students from five county schools.
- Provided a range of activities on ecology, wildlife, plant life, water, and natural resources to 77 youth at CoreSRQ summer camp.
- Explore Your Environment summer camp provided two, one-week sessions for 38 youth (ages 10-15) with lessons and field activities on ecology, nutrition, plants, conservation, and other science topics.
- Partnered with nonprofit organizations to conduct a local event on agriculture and outdoor safety, providing youth and families with information on minimizing risks on farms and in rural areas.
- Delivered youth education and information events on agriculture, nutrition, solar energy, energy conservation and more at multiple events.
- Coordinating with Sarasota County Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources, developed and delivered “Take A Child Outside Week” activity series, comprising 10 educational, nature-themed family events at various county sites, including an afternoon of hands-on stations at Extension, a saltwater fishing clinic, invasive plant removal activity and more.
- Delivered youth-focused environmental lessons and outdoor activities to more than 800 Sarasota County fourth and fifth grade students, on topics covering freshwater ecosystems, watersheds, water quality, biodiversity, and more.



# 2023 Program Highlights

## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

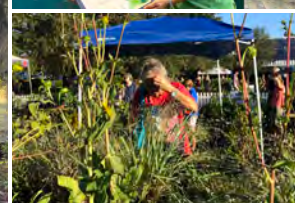
- Provided sustainable agriculture technical assistance to multiple farmers and ranchers, on topics including soil testing, weed management, pasture renovation, tomato diseases, and analysis of metal content in soils and plants. This included site visits/consultations to agricultural operations to address soil, pasture, disease and other questions.
- Provided guidance on hurricane recovery options, assistance, and government funding possibilities for agricultural and nursery operations.
- Organized and led two farm and ranch tours, with 140 total participants visiting and learning about the county's agriculture industry, including a cattle ranch, vegetable farm, native plant nursery, and aquaculture/aquaponics site.
- Delivered two sessions of "Small Farm Startup School," with 28 households participating in an eight-week program focused on launching a new agriculture operation. Half of the households developed business plans, four signaled intent to seek funding assistance, and five are actively seeking land.
- Provided educational opportunities on local food systems, backyard gardening/growing, agriculture awareness, and more.
- Launched "Small Farm Incubator Program," in collaboration with Mote Aquaculture Research Park, converting two acres of land into vegetable/fruit production site and engaging two families at kickoff.
- Developed and launched the "Beginning Farmer Apprenticeship Program" for participants to shadow and learn from agriculture professionals/practitioners.
- Analyzed local food system needs and developed plan to address gaps through partnerships, fundraising, infrastructure, and programs, with recommendations to:
  - Create an online food hub that addresses the lack of awareness of real-time local food availability.
  - Increase specialty markets for local food.
  - Establish systems to support beginning farmers with education, infrastructure, networking, on-the-job training, and linkage to key customers.
  - Identify factors that create barriers to entry for beginning farmers and ranchers. Explore how these factors can be mitigated.



# 2023 Program Highlights

## GARDENING AND LANDSCAPING

- Developed and hosted a series of five Arbor Day workshops, with information on choosing and caring for trees suited to local landscapes. Roughly 150 participating households adopted native trees to plant in their yards.
- Distributed seeds, seedlings, informational/educational publications and related materials to 31 school gardens, with a reach of 5,100 students, and delivered training workshop for teachers/volunteers.
- Partnered in edible garden startups at five new locations, including churches and schools, providing materials and expert advice.
- Completed comprehensive training for 15 new participants in the Master Gardener Volunteer program (adding to 121 active volunteers), on plant identification, pest control, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, irrigation, fertilizer/pesticide use, and more.
- Shared Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ information and practices, tips and techniques for resource protection with 500-plus individuals at various events and locations.
- Hosted the 17th annual Plant Sale + EdFest, with roughly 700 attendees. Plant sales totaled nearly \$24,000 (used for future educational efforts), and staff and volunteers shared information about landscaping, conservation and other Extension services.
- Increased awareness of and access to gardening resources with the development of a new story map (an interactive, online, exploration tool), along with a story maps landing page on the Extension website.
- Continued design, permitting, and fundraising toward Educational Outreach Gardens project at Extension office, securing \$150,000 in grant funding.
- Plant Clinic help desks, staffed by Master Gardener Volunteers, provided support to 2,197 contacts on topics related to landscapes, gardening, insects, and more.
- Provided industry-focused training on pesticide use/application and landscaping issues, and administered 97 licensing exams for government and private sector green industry professionals.
- Assisted 50-plus Sarasota County residents and commercial pest control operators with insect identification and support, to save beneficial insects with alternative controls.



# 2023 Program Highlights

## NUTRITION AND HEALTHY LIVING

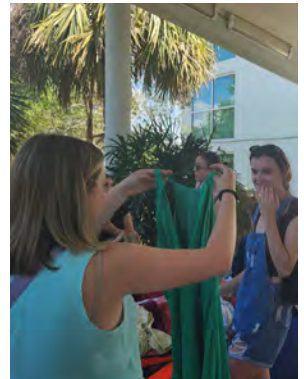
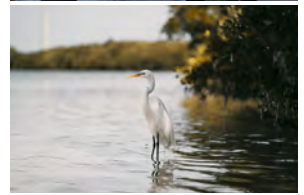
- Delivered 400 nutrition education, healthy lifestyle, and gardening classes to youth audiences totaling 6,940 students through Extension's Family Nutrition Program.
- Delivered nutrition education and healthy lifestyle classes to adult audiences, via online and in-person presentations.
- Developed and launched "Ways to Save" initiative, with videos, blog posts, publications and other materials that provide individuals easy-to-adopt tips and techniques for cutting costs at home.
- Delivered storm readiness/disaster preparation lessons and techniques to more than 230 community members, through workshops across the county, and distributed a series of related fact sheets.
- Authored disaster-related blogs in advance of and after Hurricane Idalia, with topics on tax-free hurricane supply shopping, post-storm best practices, post-storm food safety, and post-storm fraud avoidance.
- Posted health-focused "Turkey Talk" blog series, delivering information about selecting, handling, defrosting and cooking holiday meals with food safety and nutrition in mind.
- Completed 11-part "Age Friendly" blog series as a complement to ongoing Extension classes that provide seniors with information on nutrition, exercise, and other health topics.
- Created and distributed through local nonprofit groups disaster preparedness resiliency kits containing information, hand-crank radios, flashlights, batteries and other tangible items.
- Engaged in healthy-living partner meetings, including Health Services Advisory Committee, Health Equality Coalition of Sarasota County, and Florida Department of Health (Sarasota County).
- Family Nutrition Program supported 15 gardens in the community, with a reach of 1,642 youth participants.



# 2023 Program Highlights

## NATURAL RESOURCES

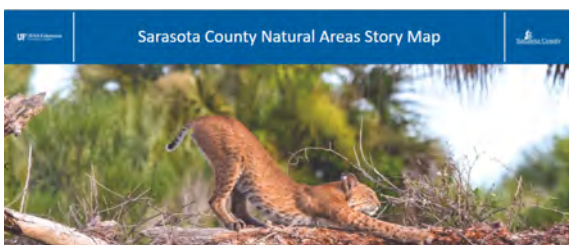
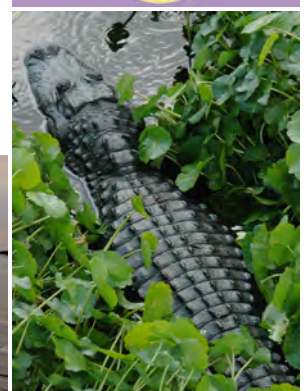
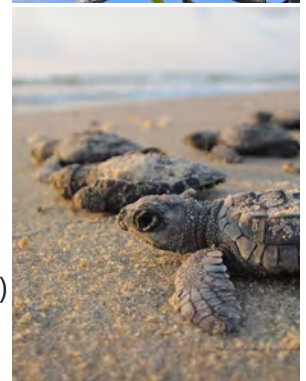
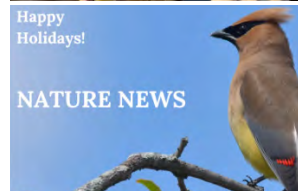
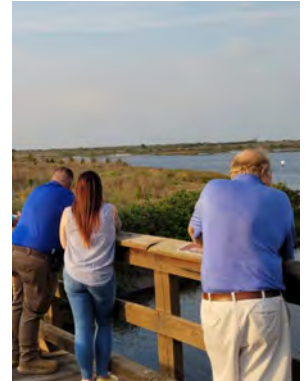
- Provided workforce training on mangrove trimming best management practices to environmental professionals and landscapers operating in Sarasota County.
- Presented information on managing stormwater ponds to optimize water quality and ecosystem health at multiple venues.
- Delivered the freshwater systems and coastal core modules of the Florida Master Naturalist Program, with participants from government, private, public, and nonprofit sectors.
- Trained Florida Master Naturalist Program instructors statewide on a new uplands ecosystems environmental interpretation module co-authored by Sarasota County Extension's ecology and natural resources educator.
- Conducted stormwater pond sampling and analyses at five Sarasota County communities to assess water quality and management practices, as part of the multi-agency Healthy Ponds Collaborative effort.
- Presented to science lab teachers in Sarasota County School District about Extension's Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) program for fourth and fifth grade students.
- The Green Business Partnership added five new partners, increasing membership to more than 250 local businesses, and measured an increase of 72 percent in recycling among partners.
- Hosted clothing swap event to promote the reduced environmental impact and water savings from reusing clothes.
- In 26 water conservation classes, more than 530 registrants learned how to reduce water consumption inside and outside the home. In addition, 41 people received an on-site irrigation evaluation, which helps some of the highest water users fix significant issues and reduce demand on the utility system. These 2023 programs are estimated to have saved more than 1.9 million gallons of water.
- Assisted with composting at seven community locations and seven sites, helping to divert 5,000 pounds of waste from landfills.



# 2023 Program Highlights

## NATURAL RESOURCES (cont'd)

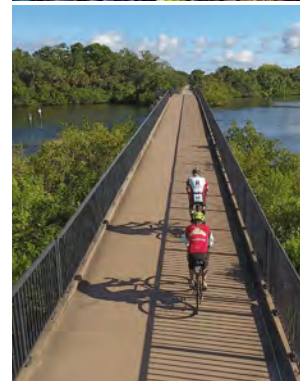
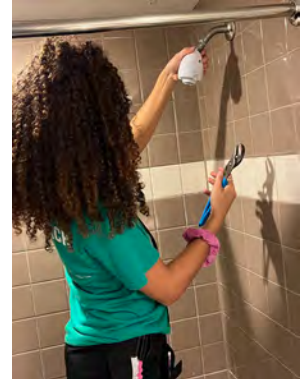
- Provided sea turtle conservation and sustainable fishing practices information to 550 individuals at a series of Hope 4 Communities events.
- Redesigned and launched a new ecology and natural resources-themed newsletter to share Extension information and opportunities, with an initial audience reach of 520.
- Provided guidance for a Casey Key community (consisting of 300 homes) on erosion control, stormwater runoff from roofs, best management practices of storm ponds, and more.
- Developed and hosted family-friendly events for 77 participants at the Venice Area Audubon Rookery to share information about bat and bird roles in ecosystems.
- Increased awareness of and access to natural area resources with the development of a new story map (an interactive, online, exploration tool), along with a story maps landing page on Extension website.
- Updated online Bay-Friendly Fertilizing tools (for residences and golf courses) to help individuals assess fertilizer need and application rates and minimize adverse impacts on waters and ecosystems.
- Facilitated expansion of the statewide Living Shoreline project, with workforce training added for additional Florida counties on planning, installing and maintaining shoreline buffers made with natural resources.
- Led a workshop on nature's nurturing effects for 30 nursing professionals.
- Educated six homeowners associations (235 attendees) about managing interactions with local wildlife, and seven homeowners associations (204 attendees) about alligator safety.
- Developed and launched "Treasure Quest," a youth-focused education activity, to multiple county library and park sites, providing information about natural resources, wildlife, plants, history, and more to children and teens through a "scavenger hunt"-style project.
- Continued enhancement of "Explore Your World" and "Family Green Living" backpack kits, available for free checkout at Sarasota County libraries, with more kits in development.



# 2023 Program Highlights

## SUSTAINABILITY

- Delivered energy-saving devices and low-flow products, as well as conservation education to financially challenged households, with estimated annual savings of:
  - 383,436 kilowatt-hours of energy,
  - 938,616 million gallons of water, and
  - Roughly \$38,900 in utility bills.
- Trained additional Energy Coach volunteers, who deliver energy- and water-saving information and devices, including LED light bulbs and low-flow showerheads, to financially challenged households.
- Sarasota County earned LEED “Gold” certification for its sustainability and resilience efforts across the county, from the U.S. Green Building Council, in the Cities and Communities category.
- Initiated climate change vulnerability assessment of Sarasota County, to develop adaptation plan under two-year, \$275,000 Resilient Florida Program grant.
- Partnered with nonprofit Science and Environment Council to conduct the Green Living Expo and EcoSummit (building on annual Sustainable Communities Workshop), reaching 2,000 people with sustainability and equity information.
- Shared sustainability information and tools with 89 Spanish-speaking families at an Alta Vista Elementary School event, and partnered with UnidosNow to deliver Spanish-language “Energy Upgrade” class to 34 Spanish-speaking residents.
- Provided energy- and water-saving information to 550 individuals at series of Hope 4 Communities events.
- Delivered energy/resource conservation and other sustainability information and tools to 1,800 individuals through nearly 30 events across Sarasota County.
- Presented information about Sarasota County sustainability and energy equity efforts to 165 peers at professional conferences.
- Secured federal funding for the EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program, a pivotal step in spearheading our region’s efforts to address climate change.
- Presented on energy burden solutions at the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact workshop, reaching 200-plus individuals in local/state governments and nonprofits.
- Utilized a \$100,000 grant from Florida Counties Low-Income Residential Energy Efficient Grant Program in 2023 for energy- /water-efficient appliances and HVAC systems for financially challenged households.





# Looking Ahead: 2024

## SARASOTA COUNTY STARTER KIT



Get “A Guide to Living on the Suncoast,” packed with essential information, from saving on utilities to living with local wildlife, for new (and current) residents.

Learn more:  
[tiny.cc/ufsaraext\\_starterkit](https://tiny.cc/ufsaraext_starterkit).

## EXTENSION VIRTUAL TOUR

Our many demonstration areas showcase gardening, composting, and more. Soon, we’ll launch a virtual tour to enable visits from a computer, phone, tablet or more. Find the information you want, and advice you can use, at your fingertips.



## EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH GARDENS



We’re working on a number of new garden areas at our Twin Lakes Park office, to show you ways you can add beauty and productivity to your land while also helping the environment. Visit to learn about edible gardening, bioswales, butterfly/pollinator gardens, and more.

## SARASOTA COUNTY FAIR

Don’t miss the Sarasota County Fair and the scores of 4-H youth who participate with projects, from arts and crafts to livestock showing. March 15-24, 2024..

Learn more:  
[www.sarasotafair.com](http://www.sarasotafair.com)



# Looking Ahead: 2024 (cont'd)

## ANNUAL PLANT SALE + EDFEST



This FREE, family-friendly event features sustainable gardening education, landscape issue diagnosis, and thousands of plants for sale, plus an open house to showcase all Extension offers. Oct 12, 2024.

Learn more:  
[tiny.cc/ufsaraext\\_plantsale](https://tiny.cc/ufsaraext_plantsale).

## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES WORKSHOP

Get information on best practices to build lasting, equitable communities, with expert speakers, an array of panels, networking opportunities, exhibitor demonstrations, and more. Nov. 07, 2024.



Learn more:  
[tiny.cc/ufsaraext\\_scw](https://tiny.cc/ufsaraext_scw).

Find all our events and activities at [ufsarasotaext.eventbrite.com](https://ufsarasotaext.eventbrite.com), or subscribe to our "Class Blast" newsletter ([tiny.cc/ufsaraext\\_news](https://tiny.cc/ufsaraext_news)) for biweekly updates. And, don't forget to find and follow us: [Facebook.com/ufsarasotaext](https://Facebook.com/ufsarasotaext), [Instagram.com/ufsarasotaextension](https://Instagram.com/ufsarasotaextension), [YouTube.com/@ufsarasotaext](https://YouTube.com/@ufsarasotaext), [LinkedIn.com/company/ufsarasotaext](https://LinkedIn.com/company/ufsarasotaext), and [Pinterest.com/ufsarasotaext](https://Pinterest.com/ufsarasotaext).





Green Building, Twin Lakes Park  
6700 Clark Road, Sarasota

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